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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, March 24, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Convenient Closets for the Children." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

"Please," I begged my neighbor, "Please tell me all you know about children's clothes closets. I'm talking to my radio friends on that subject today. Of course, I want them to hear about those useful and delightful closets you have fixed up for your children. Yes, I do. And I want you to tell me every single idea, big or little, that you have on the subject."

My neighbor smiled and thanked me, but her manner was somehow very vague. She gazed out of the window with a far-away expression, the kind of a look a crystal gazer has when she reads your future in her crystal ball. There was no mistaking the signs. I sadly suspected that this happened to be one of the days when my neighbor's mind was on the future and not on everyday practical household things. From long experience I had learned that such an expression in her eyes usually meant that she was thinking of some abstract bit of idealism -- perhaps, the future of the race, or international legislation on child labor, or the proper development of the younger generation. Her first words certainly indicated that I was right.

"If I were giving your talk today, Aunt Sammy, I would start by saying: 'A well-equipped clothes closet may have much to do with your child's success all through life. His happiness and mental health both as a child and as an adult may depend -----'"

Oh, dear, I knew it. Didn't I tell you that I suspected she was thinking of the future of the race today?

"Please," I said. (I really had to interrupt her in the middle of that sentence.) "I'll be glad to hear about mental health or even the whole state of the universe at any other time, but just now I can't think of anything but closets. Couldn't you just concentrate on that subject this morning?"

"If you would be patient, Aunt Sammy, and wait until I finished one paragraph at least, you would see what I'm getting at. It may sound ridiculous at first to mention a child's closet as a factor in his success in life, but that really may be the truth. Anyway, I'd like to give you my opinions, and then you can judge for yourself."

I felt so contrite that I promised my neighbor not to say a word until she finished, no matter what strange ideas she had. I promised just to sit and listen quietly and learn what I could, whether I believed it or not.

"Every wise parent or aunt today, Aunt Sammy, believes that it pays to teach children early such habits as self-reliance, responsibility and order. Isn't that true?"

"Very true," I said, "but what has that to do with clothes closets?"

"Please wait. You promised to, you know. In the old days every little child, almost from the time he could walk, had some job he was responsible for around the house. He had to take part in all the work of the household and there was lots of it. Today, with our small homes and apartments, many of the jobs children once were given are done outside the home."

"Then how are you suggesting that they can learn these habits of independence, responsibility, and so on with nothing to practice on?"

"Why not let them learn to care for their own things -- toys, books, but especially clothes and dressing materials? What better way could there be for a child to learn the orderliness that he can carry right on through life until it helps make him an efficient business man?"

"In too many homes the mother seems to ^{be} valet to the whole family. She spends hours of every day picking up blocks after Tommy, muddy rubbers after Johnny, and bath towels or newspapers after Father. How simple it would be if each person from grandfather down to two-year-old Tommy took care of his own possessions."

"Very fine ideas, but what about the closets?"

My neighbor looked at me reproachfully and sighed a deep sigh.

"I am coming to the clothes closets, if you will only give me time. The important habits I was just talking about, when I was interrupted, are only to be developed if the home is properly arranged. A well-equipped wardrobe, where the small child may easily and comfortably hang up his own clothes, will be far more useful in teaching order than a thousand harangues and naggings from his mother."

"Good," I said, "I begin to see light. I like that idea about a place where Tommy can hang up his things easily and comfortably. I've seen too many youngsters struggling to get coats and hats on and off hooks that were above their heads and far out of reach. No wonder they often get tired and discouraged and drop their things on a chair or even on the floor."

My neighbor nodded. "Half the battle in training a child in these matters is to provide convenient arrangements that will enable him to do what you ask, even with his short arms and inexperienced fingers. For success in

teaching him these habits, it is also necessary to see that he does them regularly. Proper simple equipment like low hooks, plenty of hangers and low shelves or drawers that slide easily will help the child gain a sense of pride in accomplishment from looking after his own possessions each day. But if the arrangements make it difficult for him to carry out your demands, naturally he will try to avoid them.

"For play-clothes a convenient entry may be fixed up for the children's hats and rubbers. If there is a basement door in the house, that will be the logical one for them to use. A strip of hooks placed for easy reach and as near as possible to the outer door may be put up. Above it there may be a narrow shelf, six or seven inches wide, for caps and mittens. On the floor below the hooks, a wooden box or a low shelf or even a market basket can hold rubbers and galoshes in wet and muddy weather.

"Just inside the outer door I suggest a mat for the children to stand on while taking off their rubbers. And a small, easily handled broom nearby will encourage even the smallest to brush dust or snow off his footwear.

"In homes like mine, however, where such an entry arrangement is not possible, a first floor closet fitted up conveniently takes care of this need. The hall closet, Aunt Sammy, could be the subject of a good Sunday sermon. I think I'll suggest it the next time our preacher calls. For, really, that closet may be either a great blessing for the whole household or the cause of daily family strife, all depending on how it is arranged. Take our closet for example. It was a dark, inconvenient room that served for years as the family dumping ground. Everything was chucked in there -- from skates to school books. And then what a commotion at the rush hour in the morning when the man of the house was late to the office but couldn't find his umbrella, and when Susan had lost one glove or Jack one overshoe and it was school time. I'm glad I reformed that hall closet. It was a dreadful blight in our happy home.

"Today the closet has plenty of light -- a window for daylight and electricity for evening. And it has a nice painted wall that is easily kept clean and a washable floor. There is a place provided for every single article that belongs in that closet. But no unsorted jumble of possessions allowed anymore.

"The highest shelf holds Father's hats; the next lower shelf holds mine. And each hat is on its own metal or wooden holder. A third shelf is for the taller children and, finally, the lowest shelf is placed where the youngest can reach and put away his own caps and hats.

"Since garments wear longer and stay in better shape on hangers than on hooks, children may as well learn early to use these for their clothes. So we have a high rod and hangers for the grown-ups' coats and a low rod with smaller hangers for the children. Just above the floor we have a low narrow shelf running around three sides of the closet. It is just wide enough to accommodate shoes, galoshes, skates and boots. Partitions divide this shelf into separate spaces assigned to these different varieties of footwear. For gloves there are

cloth pockets tacked on the door. One little side shelf holds sweaters and scarfs, because knitted garments are likely to stretch out of shape if they are hung up.

"And everything is labelled according to the member of the family who uses it -- every hook, every space, every hanger. Then there is no misunderstanding about whose possessions go where."

My neighbor declares that her children really enjoy being orderly, now that they are provided with proper equipment to help.

Tomorrow: "The Supplies for Home Medicine Closet."

